



# Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Pinedale Region

October 2017 Newsletter

## Soda Lake Brooks and Browns

The Pinedale fisheries crew sampled trout populations in Soda Lake during the first week of October. The brook trout captured had an average length of 14.9 inches and an average weight of 1.62 pounds. Brown trout averaged 18.3 inches long and 2.43 pounds. The largest fish captured was a 26.6 inch long brown trout that weighed 9.3 pounds. The average length of brown trout this year is very close to the long-term average noted since 1997, while average size of brook trout is over an inch longer than the long-term average for that species.

It is estimated there are currently about 6,900 brook trout in Soda Lake, which is very similar to the number noted in October 2016. The brown trout population estimate is about 8,100 fish, which is the highest number seen since 2001. The uptick in brown trout numbers has also been noted by anglers this fall, with catch rates being higher. The water level has increased by 20 inches since last fall. However, fall and winter weather will dictate whether these fish survive through the winter. Factors such as snow and ice depth and the length of time the lake is ice-covered all play a part in trout survival at Soda Lake.



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*Pinedale Fish Technician Colter Brown transfers a load of fish from the hoop net to the live well for weighing and measuring.*



*Pinedale Fish Technician Colter Brown weighs a hefty brown trout from Soda Lake.*



*A brook trout (Left) and a brown trout (Right) are released back into Soda Lake.*







# Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

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### Tough Deer Opener

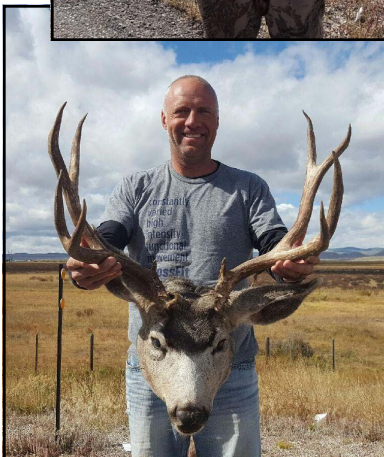
Game wardens for the Pinedale Region are reporting a slow deer hunting season overall. This was expected after the hard winter experienced last year, but the opening days also were met with rain, snow and generally “socked-in” conditions making hunting even more difficult (Right). North Pinedale Game Warden Bubba Haley reported some hunters opting to forego hunting mule deer this year because populations took such a hit and concentrating on elk hunting instead. Wildlife managers estimate the overall deer harvest to be about half of what it has been in recent years.

However, Big Piney Game Warden Adam Hymas and Wildlife Biologist Gary Fralick both report that it wasn’t all doom and gloom this season. Some hunters reported seeing several bucks and does with fawns and even some does with twin fawns. And despite the lower harvest, there were still several nice bucks taken again.



*Opening day deer season conditions near the Sawtooth in the Gros Ventre Range made it difficult to spot animals.*

*Photo by Bubba Haley*





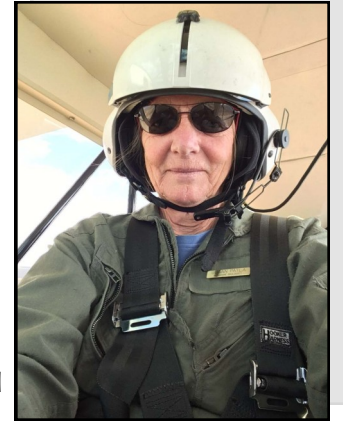


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### Swan Flight

Nongame Wildlife Biologist Susan Patla conducted the Pacific Flyway trumpeter swan fall survey flights on Sept. 17 and 18 in western Wyoming, which is a coordinated survey with Idaho and Montana to count resident swans in the Greater Yellowstone population. Patla counted a total of 254 swans (198 white adults and 58 gray cygnets or young of the year), overall a decrease of 5% compared to 2016. A majority of Wyoming's resident swans (67%) currently are found in the Green River drainage. The number of white swans counted decreased for the first time in the Green River survey area, falling from 149 in 2016 to 131 (12% decrease) while cygnet

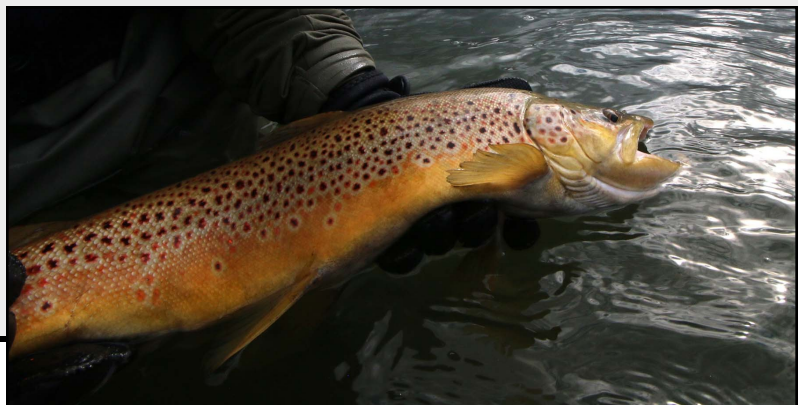


production was similar (43 compared to 45 in 2016). After seven years of almost 10% growth in the Green River basin, the number of white swans leveled off in 2016 and decreased in 2017. In the Pinedale/Green River Regions the number of nesting pairs (19) was lower compared to 2016 (24) indicating the effects of a cold, late spring with high run-off. Some high elevation lakes did not open up until June and other nest sites were inundated by flood water. Future surveys will show if this newly expanded nesting population is reaching carrying capacity or if swans will continue to expand into new habitat. The department hopes to continue wetland conservation and restoration work with partners to keep this population growing.



### From the Front Desk...

Pinedale Game and Fish Office Managers would like to remind hunters they have detailed hunt area maps available for the Pinedale region for \$15.50 (Below left). One of the more popular questions office managers have been getting lately is whether Soda Lake is currently open to fishing. The answer is Yes. Soda Lake will close to fishing November 15 through April 30. The creel limit on trout (including brook trout) is one (1) per day or in possession. In the springtime, Soda Lake reopens on May 1 when the Soda Lake Wildlife Habitat Management Area opens for public access. Enjoy!







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### Working for WY Range Deer

Pinedale Habitat Biologist Jill Randall has been busy working with several partners to improve habitat for the prized Wyoming Range Deer Herd. Following the completion of a Wyoming Range mule deer habitat assessment, the Wyoming Game and Fish has been partnering with both federal and private land managers on an ambitious plan to improve over 45,000 acres of key deer transition and winter ranges from 2014-2021. To date, from 2014-2017, the following activities have been completed:

- 11,400 acres of sagebrush mechanical thinning to promote diversity
- 2,900 acres of aspen cutting to increase fuels for prescribed fire and promote aspen resprouting
- 900 acres of prescribed fire for aspen regeneration
- 12,300 acres of herbicide treatment for cheatgrass removal
- 1970 acres of cheatgrass hand grubbing/pulling post-treatment
- Four riders hired to distribute livestock away from treated areas
- 11 miles of new lay-down fencing to help with livestock distribution
- One water reservoir

Treatments involve BLM, State and Private lands. The Game and Fish Department's Habitat and Access crew has continued with additional mechanical treatments on sagebrush this fall in the Deer Hills and Little Mesa areas near Big Piney. The areas of sagebrush that have been identified for treatment are being mowed at approximately 30-50% coverage in a random mosaic type pattern (Right). Monitoring of past treatments has shown regeneration of grasses, forbs and sagebrush (Below).

Additional future treatments include use of the Lawson aerator, seeding, Plateau and Spike treatments on sagebrush, and prescribed burning of aspen. This large-scale multi-year habitat project addresses specific goals outlined in the Wyoming Range Mule Deer Initiative and is estimated to cost over 3 million dollars. The following funding partners have contributed to date: WY Wildlife & Natural Resource Trust, WY Land-scape Conservation Initiative, WY Game and Fish, Bureau of Land Management, WY Governors Big Game License Coalition, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Mule Deer Foundation, Muley Fanatics Foundation, Denbury and Exxon.



*Sagebrush mowing being done WY Game and Fish Habitat & Access crew in the Deer Hills area west of Big Piney this fall.*



*(Left) Examples of grass and sagebrush regeneration after mowing.*